

## THE USE OF EMBARGO RIGHT IN CONTEXT OF MEDIA RELATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The provisions of embargo is listed in the Indonesian Journalistic Code of Ethics, article 7, which oblige Indonesian journalist to respect the provisions of embargo according to the agreement.“(Emphasize added). Embargo in journalistic terms means postponement of information publishing in accordance to the inquiry of news source. Thus, media is prohibited to make the information publicly until the agreed date, or minimum in the afternoon before the agreed date (DeMaria, 2004, p.2359)*

*In practice, there is pro and contra in the implementation of embargo. At one side, embargo can protect the society from wrong information, but on the other hand this provision is sometimes considered as the obstacle for press freedom.*

*This research aims to understand the use of embargo provisions by an institution, whether they understand their right as news sources and whether the press gives them that right. The data will be collected through in-depth interview to get the source's insight through semi-structured interview. Primary data will be the interview results with board of Ikatan Apoteker Indonesia (Indonesian Pharmacists Association) Jakarta, police official of Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta, and BPOM (Food and Drug Supervisory Agency) Yogyakarta.*

*The interview results and analysis show that all the institutions (subjects of this research) have not really understood the concept and definition of embargo. However, practically, Food and Drug Supervisory Agency of Yogyakarta and Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta have implemented the principle of embargo to ask the media to keep/hold some sensitive information not to be published until the agreed time.*

*The low usage of embargo right makes the institutions cannot conduct their work properly because the information leak to the public before the institution process the case completely. Because of the information leak, public can have misunderstanding about the case. The institutions' understanding of media relations also becomes a problem in several case, such as IAI (Association of Pharmacist of Indonesia that does not understand how to maintain a good relation with the media.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Embargo, Journalism Ethics & Media Relations*

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Media life cannot be separated from the existence of news sources, whether an individual source or an institutional ones. Those news sources can guarantee the life of media to be capable of giving the credible and new information to the audiences. Except to give credible and new information for society, usually media tend to compete with each other to give the fastest information. In order to prevent an unhealthy competition between media in regard of news sources, the provision of embargo is exist in journalism practice in Indonesia.

Embargo is listed in Journalistic Code of Ethics of Indonesia (Kode etik, 2011), in its interpretation, embargo is defined as the postponement of information inclusion or publication in accordance with the request from news sources or the information giver. Thus, media generally, is prohibited to open the information to the public until the date that has been determined by news sources (DeMaria, 2004, p. 2359).

The provision of embargo is usually applied to certain issues, such as important information about sensitive issues or issues with big impact, like drugs, national security, medical/health issue, or pharmacy. Embargo cannot be applied to general information, like meeting's result, but more to certain information that is specifically requested by the news sources, which usually comes from institution, individual or a journal (Kassirer, 1994, p. 1609).

DeMaria (2004) states, that there are two important things that can be actually obtained by using embargo. *First*, embargo gives opportunity to the news source to give more comprehensive information than only a press release. This can prevent public overreaction, when they get incomplete information on sensitive issue. *Second*, embargo also gives the media the opportunity to complete the information and makes it more credible for the public to be consumed (p. 2359).

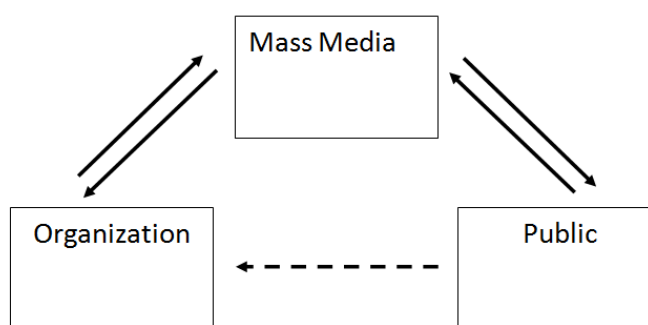
Even though embargo basically has good aim for every party, however, this provision is vulnerable to breach. Sometime the media use a reason, such as that they get the information on that issue from other source. This provision can also be considered as restraint to press freedom. Thus, this research tries to find out, whether the organization or institution understands their right to use embargo of information; and whether the media implement this provision as part of their code of ethics. This issue is important to discuss, more over because this provision is potential to bring conflict between media and the organization/institution. Particularly because embargo does not oblige both parties to make a written agreement, so that journalist could easily break the deal.

Dunwoody (1999, p. 75) says that when journalist break the deal, even the fellow journalist will castigate this person. The common punishment is that he/she can be blacklisted by the organization, which means the media where he/she works will lose the chance to get the important information from that organization.

The relation between media and an institution should be seen in a wide framework of thinking. This relation is not only a transactional relation, which only highlights the interest of each party. The media only needs information from the institution as news source and the institution only aims to manage their good image in front of the public.

Relation in this context stresses more on the effort of both parties to work together for the sake of their service to public. The relation between both parties is not only narrowed to the relation between PR officers of an institution with a journalist, but the relation between media as an organization, or journalist association with an institution in macro level.

Generally, the media relations practice of an institution reflects its responsibility to the public. Organization does not only a one way activity to inform the public through mass media, but also at the same time it absorbs public aspiration toward the organization through mass media. Relation between organization, mass media and the public can be seen in Figure 1 below:



**Figure 1: Communication Pattern in Media Relations**

**Source:** Iriantara (2008, p. 31)

Figure 1 explains that mass media, organization and public have an intertwined relation between one to the others. Mass media becomes a kind of connector in forwarding the message both from the public and from the organization. Hence, Iriantara (2008, p. 32) concludes that media relations is one field of external PR works, which task is to establish and to develop a good relation with the mass media as the communication tool to the public.

In Indonesia, researches on the provision of embargo are still hard to find. Therefore, this research aims to answer the questions on the implementation of the embargo in Jakarta and Yogyakarta. This research will answer the problems in the implementation of embargo both from the media and the institutions; IAI (Indonesia Pharmacist Association), Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta, BPOM (Food and Drug Supervisory Agency) Yogyakarta

## METHODS

This research aims to know the implementation of embargo, or the right that belongs to an organization to ask the media to hold the publication of a certain issue until the agreed time. Thus, the most suitable approach is qualitative, which is more capable to give space for the subjects' experience in detail and in-depth in the context of discussed issue (Hennink, Hutter, Bailey, 2011, p. 9). The data will be analyzed and explained descriptively in order to give the detail picture of the process of embargo agreement to the implementation, and things that happen during the agreement cutoff in the context of media relations.

The data in this research is collected through in-depth interview. According to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2011, p. 109), in-depth interview is a conversation with aim. The aim is to get the point of view from the informants through semi-structured interview, which is more to conversation than just question and answer between two parties.

Primary data in this research is the interview results with the board of IAI (Indonesia Pharmacist Association) Jakarta, police officer from Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta, and information officer from BPOM (Food and Drug Supervisory Agency) Yogyakarta. Meanwhile, the secondary data will be obtained from other sources, such as press release, journals and also journalistic code of ethics.

## RESULTS

This research involves three different institutions *First*, POLDA DIY (Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta). We assume that Police Department as a government institution that close to sensitive information. For example, terrorism, drugs trafficking and others crimes. *Second*, BPOM (Food and Drug Supervisory Agency Daerah

Istimewa Yogyakarta. This agency is responsible to sensitive issues, like distribution of poisoned food, unlicensed herbs, and imitation products. *Third*, Indonesian Pharmacist Association (IAI). This association also has a research division on medicines, including its effect. When their research finding is considered to be sensitive and related to medicine's effect, especially the medicines that have been marketed, they would not just publish the information without any consideration.

### Embargo Findings

The informants' unawareness about embargo provision is actually disadvantage them as institutions, who handle sensitive issues that related to public interest, i.e. BPOM and Police Department. They tend to choose to conceal and hold the information, and to postpone inviting the journalist until they have complete information. Yet, journalists are usually reluctant to wait too long, especially if it is a hot issue. This is supported by Isty's statement from BPOM,

*"Sebetulnya tidak pernah kita informasikan wartawan terhadap hasil pengawasan yang kita lakukan dalam arti kita tiap hari lakukan pengawasan, kemudian kita lakukan pemeriksaan di lab, selama tidak pernah ada masalah tidak dikabari ke wartawan. Kalau ada kasus biasanya wartawan sudah tahu. Tim pemeriksaan ketika mau melakukan pengecekan pasti wartawan pengen ikut, kami mencoba untuk merahasiakan eksekusi pemeriksaan tapi wartawan kan tidak mau diberi hasil saja, tapi kami penyidik melalui aduan masyarakat, kita udah diem-diem, tapi bocor juga ke wartawan."* (Istiorini, wawancara 9 Maret 2016)

### Translation

*"Actually, we never inform the journalists about the result of our surveillance. We do it every day, and we check it to the lab. If there is no problem, we do not contact the journalists. If there is an issue, usually they the journalists have known it. The journalists usually want to come with the surveillance team, we always try to conceal the execution but they never want to have only the result. We have done secretly but it somehow leaked to the journalists."* (Istiorini, interview 9 March 2016)

In fact, by using the provision of embargo that listed in Journalistic Code of Ethics article 7, the journalists can be included in the investigation process or given information about the case, but asked not to publish it until the investigation is completed and BPOM has the complete and correct information to be given to the public.

By not using the provision of embargo, the work of Isty and her team in BPOM becomes harder. They have to keep the secret in their team and also give understanding continuously to the journalists to be patience because the data has not been complete.

*"Kalau datanya belum lengkap kami jelaskan, setelah data lengkap kami panggil lagi."* (Istiorini, wawancara 9 Maret 2016)

### Translation

*"If the data has not been complete, we will explain it to them. After it is complete we will call them again"* (Istiorini, interview, 9 March 2016)

Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta (POLDA DIY) has actually understood about the concept of embargo. Even though they have never really read Journalistic Code of Ethics article 7, in practice they have used their embargo right in their relation with the media/journalist. In executing operation with sensitive issue like drugs, a person that has

many men (masses), and also government officer, POLDA DIY always requests the journalist not to directly publish the whole information to the public. POLDA DIY does it for several reasons, such as: the police still in the process of developing the case to other suspects, the police do not want the suspect to be humiliated in front of the public (for the government officer's case), and if the perpetrator has strong masses, news in media could worsen the situation and disturb the process of arrest.

*"Misalnya kita baru nangkep satu orang pengguna narkoba, nah kalau mau nangkep pengedar juga, biar ga sulit nangkep pengedarnya kita minta wartawan untuk menjaga beberapa info kayak nama tersangka dan lokasi penangkapan"* (Suwanto, wawancara 23 April 2016)

### Translation

"For example when we caught a drug user, if we want an easier process in catching the dealer, we ask the journalist to keep some information, like the name of the suspect and location of the ambush" (Suwanto, interview, 23 April 2016)

POLDA DIY states, that their embargo request is well accommodated by the journalists. POLDA DIY believes that the journalists tend to obey the embargo request from the police department, mainly because the journalists need much important information from them.

IAI (Indonesian Pharmacist Association) is the only institution, based on interview result, that has no experience and knowledge on media relations. They also do not have the understanding about embargo because they have lack of communication with the media. Therefore, the data that has been collected from IAI is not really relevant to the concept of embargo in this research. Based on the information from Nofendri, Secretary General of IAI, embargo is not used by IAI because they rarely publish sensitive information, such as research on new medicine in pharmacy industry. The high cost to do a research becomes the reason why IAI rarely conducts research,

*"Kita jarang sih publikasi hasil penemuan obat baru, itu soalnya mahal banget mas, biasanya yang suka penelitian gitu sih perusahaan farmasi di luar (negeri) atau perusahaan farmasi besar semacam Dexa atau Kalbe Farma. Itupun mereka tidak sembarang publikasiin, soalnya kan itu rahasia perusahaan"* (Nofendri, wawancara 2 Juni 2016).

### Translation:

"We rarely publish new medicine inventions because it is really expensive. Usually the ones who do such research are overseas pharmacy company or huge corporation like Dexa or Kalbe Farma. But they do not publish it carelessly because it is company confidential" (Nofendri, interview, 2 June 2016).

Nofendri says that usually information on new inventions in pharmacy is organized by GPFI (Alliance of Indonesian Pharmacy Entrepreneurs). Nofendri admits that some IAI members work in the companies, which are members of GPFI. But they will not open the information easily because it is company's data.

### Media Relations Findings

Even though the provision of embargo is not used by BPOM Yogyakarta, Isty and her team is benefited from their close relation with the journalists, which is built via chat group. Isty uses this group to communicate with the journalists.

This social relation makes the journalists tend to understand and obey, when they are asked not to publish an incomplete case.

*“Iya, walaupun ngobrol yang tidak berkaitan dengan kasus juga bisa diobrolkan di grup tersebut. Jangan sampai kita yang butuh baru kita undang. Kadang-kadang ndagel juga kok, selama masih sopan. Selama ini (wartawan) patuh kok, selama mereka mengerti, jangan ketus sama mereka, mereka kita rangkul.” (Istiorini, wawancara, 9 Maret 2016)*

### Translation

“Yes, topics that are not related to a case can also be discussed in the group. Do not invite them only when we need them. Sometimes (they are) also funny, as long as they are still polite. All this time, the journalists obey (the request), as long as they understand, we should not be too sharp to them, we should embrace them” (Istiorini, interview, 9 March 2016)

If we see it in the practice, actually BPOM has used embargo informally. The request not to publish or disseminate information is done based on informal request from Isty to the journalists, without any understanding about embargo in Journalistic Code of Ethics. The chat group is used to develop good relation between BPOM and the media.

According to the concept from Iriantara (2008, p. 31), media is the connector between organization and the public. Media hold a key role to guarantee the smoothness of communication flow from the organization to the public and vice versa. Thus, a good relation between the media and the organization should be maintained.

If BPOM uses group chat to maintain the relation with the journalists, POLDA DIY has their own way. Mass media in Yogyakarta always assigns their journalist to stand by a post in police stations. The journalist will be in this post every day to monitor the latest information in the police department. It is likely, that some police officer build close relation to the journalist and it becomes risky for both professions. Therefore, in some period of time, media will relocate the journalist to move to another post.

As an effort to maintain the good relation, POLDA DIY always uses the mechanism of right to answer, if they are harmed by the news. Even though POLDA DIY still feels that the mechanism does not really safe their good name, they still use it because they realize that it is the procedure in media relation. This is one of the factors that guarantee the relation between media and the police department. Even, the media often come or are allowed to come with police officers in an operation.

*“Banyak anggota kami yang kenal baik sama wartawan, tapi profesionalitas tetap terjaga karena mereka rolling terus setiap hari. Kalo wartawan masih belum puas dengan informasi yang didapat di lapangan, mereka pasti ke Humas dulu di kantor” (Suwanto, wawancara, 23 April 2016).*

### Translation

“Many of our officers have good relation with the journalist, but professionalism can be maintained by rolling system. If the journalist is not satisfied with the information that they get from the field, they will go to the PR officer at the office first” (Suwanto, interview, 23 April 2016)

Meanwhile, IAI does not have relation with the media because of their low literacy about media relations. Yet, Nofendri as the Secretary General of IAI, admits that actually they need media exposure for some of their activities, campaigns, and important information.

*“Yang rutin, kami selalu mengadakan seminar farmasi industri, trus saat ini kami sedang kampanye soal papan praktik apoteker, semua itu butuhin publikasi yang luas dari media, tapi ya itu, kami sekarang ini gak punya pengalaman soal berhubungan sama media” (Nofendri, wawancara 2 Juni 2016).*

### Translation

“Seminar on pharmacy industry is our routine agenda, and right now we are doing campaign about pharmacist practice board; those need publication from the media, but *yeah*, we do not have any experience about media relations” (Nofendri, interview, 2 June 2016)

## DISCUSSIONS

Based on the interview results and analysis, it can be concluded that conceptually, embargo has not fully understood by the organizations, at least it is visible in three research subjects, POLDA DIY (Regional Police Department of Yogyakarta), BPOM DIY (Food and Drug Supervisory Agency), and IAI Central (Indonesian Pharmacists Association). However, based on the practice, at least BPOM DIY and POLDA DIY have applied the principle of embargo to ask the media to keep/hold some sensitive information and not to publish it until some period of time.

## CONCLUSIONS

The low usage of embargo makes organizations cannot do their work properly because of the leaks of information to the public before they can completely process the case. The leak of information to the public can raise misunderstanding in the public. Hence, if embargo is well-used, it will guarantee that the public will get accurate information. Organizations sometimes have to face difficulties to manage the media in the field, when the media come along with them in a field duty.

The organization's understanding to have relation with media becomes also an issue in some cases, for example in IAI case. Yet, the organization needs the media to publish their activities or information that they would like to share to the public.

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